

H O M E L E S S N E S S

Homelessness accounts for a considerable amount of criminal activity throughout the city. Many of the suspects are repeat offenders, and many are well known to the police. High traffic areas usually show the greatest number of homeless persons, such as Central, Square, and Porter Squares and on major streets in these areas, namely Massachusetts Avenue. Obviously, areas with shelters (such as 240 Albany St.) also have high homeless populations. The following report depicts what crimes have been occurring in Cambridge, and by which homeless persons.

The area around 240 Albany Street is a frequent location for homeless crime; the Cambridge and Somerville Program for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Rehabilitation (CASPAR) is the only shelter in the city which admits homeless persons who are "under the influence." Its residents, due to their drug or alcohol addictions, are often more violent than the residents of other shelters. The actual homeless population of Cambridge is almost impossible to pinpoint. Due to safety considerations, volunteers in a 2002 CASPAR study were unable to investigate subway tunnels, wooded areas, and other remote locations used by homeless persons to avoid detection by authorities and predators. Census coordinator Fred Berman lamented the census (which found 414 homeless persons and only 60 actually living and sleeping on the streets) greatly underrepresented the homeless population of Cambridge: "Our ability to find and count unsheltered homeless people is too dependent

upon weather and circumstance to draw any definite conclusions."

The large numbers of what some street workers call the "new homeless," generally young people who have fled their dysfunctional families and sleep on friends' and neighbors' couches until they wear out their welcome, are increasing dramatically in Cambridge and go largely undetected by censuses. In January 2002, the Pine Street Inn reported only one male guest in the 18-24 age group, despite an average January population of 312. The Boston-based social services group Bridge Over Troubled Waters, which focuses on serving young people, has reported a 50% increase in visitors since 1994 even though the overall homeless population has decreased in that time period. These young homeless thrive in areas around Harvard and M.I.T., such as "The Pit" by the Harvard MBTA station. Cambridge's two major universities are annual hotspots for homeless crime; homeless individuals often try to take advantage of the liberal and sympathetic nature of college students when panhandling. There were only two arrests of homeless persons 22 or younger in Cambridge this year. This represents a 93% decrease from 2004. While the "Pit Rats," who generally consider themselves young enough to get back on their feet, do not commit an excessive amount of crime, that may change as this population continues to grow. The average age of a homeless individual that was arrested was 43.

Crime type	2004 # Arrests of homeless persons	% all arrests for this crime that were homeless	2005 # Arrests of homeless persons	% all arrests for this crime that were homeless
Assault (Aggravated/Simple)	12	11%	22	9%
Auto Theft	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Burglary – home or business	4	11%	3	12%
Disorderly/Drinking in Public	34	52%	24	41%
Domestic Dispute	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Driving Offenses/OUI	1	1%	4	2%
Forgery/Fraud	4	15%	2	11%
Indecent Assault	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Indecent Exposure	6	50%	6	32%
Larceny/Theft (excl. shoplifting)	7	15%	3	7%
Misc. Offenses	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Narcotics Possession/Sale	12	11%	19	15%
Peeping & Spying	1	100%	N/A	N/A
Rape	N/A	N/A	1	4%
Receiving Stolen Property	2	7%	3	13%
Robbery	5	15%	5	18%
Sex Offender Violation	3	19%	6	40%
Shoplifting	31	14%	23	12%
Trespassing	16	36%	8	22%
Vandalism	2	7%	4	19%
Violation of Restraining Order	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Warrants	1	6%	1	5%
Weapons Violations	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	141		134	

CRIME AND THE HOMELESS

The Crime Analysis Unit (CAU) understands that the most common complaint of the average citizen or business involves “visible” problems such as public intoxication, aggressive panhandling, and sleeping on public benches – not necessarily harmful or malicious incidents. However, we suspect that if the average Cambridge citizen or business comprehended the extent of crimes committed by homeless individuals – particularly in the Central Square area – their priorities regarding homeless crime would rapidly shift. Here are some quick facts:

- Eleven percent of all arrests in 2005 involved an offender who gives his/her address as “homeless” or as one of the known shelters in Cambridge, Somerville, or Boston. We expect this percentage would be higher if we broadened our search to include shelters in other cities and towns; the police department does not have data from these addresses.
 - The most common address given by someone arrested in Cambridge was 240 Albany St., accounting for just under six percent of all arrests during 2005. The second most common was simply “homeless,” accounting for fewer than five percent of all arrests.
 - Nearly two-thirds of homeless arrests were made in Area 4 and Cambridgeport. This is common as Central Square reports most of the homeless crime in the city.
 - Though they account for only about .5% of the population in Cambridge, homeless individuals make up 11% of the total arrests. Crimes influenced heavily by vagrant activity include simple assault (usually homeless fighting each other over money, food, or drugs), burglary of homes, businesses, and automobiles, disorderly conduct, drinking in public, indecent exposure (“flashing” or public urination), and trespassing.
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Crime concerns dealing with the homeless and vagrancy since the beginning of 2005 include the following:

- **Disorderly/Drinking in Public** was perpetrated by homeless individuals in nearly 18% of the homeless arrests reported in 2005. These individuals usually gather in the popular squares of the city, Central and Harvard, with other homeless. The individuals are usually arrested by a passing patrol officer who will witness first hand the drinking or disorder.
- Homeless persons made up about a third of the 19 **indecent exposure** arrests in the city. This crime is obviously committed out of the lack of a place for the homeless to resort to when out on the streets, and the accompanied public drinking. Most often these are incidents of public urination.
- **Trespassing** arrests are another obvious result of the conditions homeless live under. They are usually the result of sleeping in ATMs, attempting to enter commercial locations that these persons have been denied access to, as well as going onto campuses, such as M.I.T., and into their buildings. In 2005 eight arrests were made of this nature that involved a homeless individual. Homeless individuals often become devoted “customers” of a certain restaurant and will frequent these restaurants for free cups of

water, restroom use, and simply to get out of the cold. These arrests often occur at shelters, when a person has been kicked out and refuses to leave.

- **Aggravated and Simple Assaults** usually occur as a result of arguments that escalate to altercations, usually when liquor is involved and are also between two or more homeless people. Most of these arrests take place in Central Square. Also, police officers are frequently victims of simple assault; typically when they try to wake a homeless person who is sleeping in a public area or sitting in a restaurant or business and disturbing customers. Sixteen percent of the homeless arrests were for aggravated or simple assault.